



Case report

Using a Facebook profile in determining the motive of homicide



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ABSTRACT

Ritual homicides may be affective (emotional), but usually they are premeditated, instrumental, or predatory. In the case under review, the Facebook profile of the assailant helped to determine the motive of the homicide, which seemed to be ritualistic in nature. Therein, a 56-year-old male sustained 48 stab wounds and other knife injuries. On the wall in a room above the body, a pentagram was drawn with the victim's blood, followed by a few words which can be associated with a "Satanic" ritual. Searching through the Facebook profile of the culprit, Satanism as a leading motive of the homicide was eventually excluded. The most interesting point of this case was the evaluation of a sentence used as a Facebook status, which greatly contributed to confirm the paedophilic nature of the murder.

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1. Introduction

In terms of motives, one possible method of classification for violence (and homicides, also) is dividing them into utilitarian (instrumental or predatory) and affective (emotional) categories¹; the last motive is characterized by a lack of self-interest, preceded by high levels of sympathetic arousal, associated with the emotions of anger and/or fear, and is a response to a perceived imminent threat,² while the term "affect" indicates an instinctual reaction to stimulation occurring before the typical cognitive processes considered necessary for the formation of a more complex emotional response. Thus, affective homicides may be committed in a state of highly negative emotional charge (affect), as well as a result of such an emotional state.^{3,4}

Ritual homicides may be affectively based, but typically they are premeditated, instrumental, or predatory. Ritual homicides, sacrifices and "Satanic" rituals are themes commonly used in movies, yet they can also be seen in daily forensic practice. Psychiatric patients or others who have such similar mental problems could be

considered as those who commit these kinds of homicides. For instance, Ferracuti and DeMarco presented a ritual homicide of a child that took place during an occurrence of dissociative trance disorder.⁵ In such cases, aspects of the crime scene may be associated with ritual homicide. For example, sometimes "Satanic" symbols may be present if the assailant was apt to behave in such manner. Belonging to different cults (religious or otherwise), marginal cultural groups, and even dressing or behaving in a certain manner can prove useful in homicide investigations.⁶ The presence of a pentagram or skull and the use of blood to write and draw on walls can be details in such crime scenes. In cases of serial murders, the assailant shows thematic consistency in his signature and in clues intentionally left at the scene of the crime. However, the notion that serial sexual murderers engage in "Satanic" rituals and leave their own unique signatures at every scene has not been supported by a study done by Schlesinger.⁷

In the presented case, the Facebook (FB) profile of the assailant eventually helped to determine the motive of homicide which seemed initially to be ritualistic in nature.

2. Case report

A locally famous, 56-year-old poet was found dead in his home, having sustained 48 stab wounds, the majority of which were located on the front side of his chest and abdomen. A large

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longitudinal incised wound was located in the abdomen; one that encompassed the entire thickness of the abdominal wall and where the intestines emerged, such as in an act of seppuku (hara-kiri). The eyes of the victim were extracted. On the furniture around the corpse, there were parts of muscles and intestinal tissue which had been torn off the body. On the wall in the room above the body, a pentagram was drawn in blood, followed by the text: "Let the fucking country know what I did! Christian Pussies! I am coming!" (Note: written in assailant's native language, translated here). The homicide under review was committed on Saturday using a long kitchen knife. The police quickly arrested a 17-year-old male, who lived next door to the victim's house and who admitted to the crime. The presence of highly associative "Satanic" symbols, such as writing in blood and the pentagram on the wall, first gave police the idea that the murder was ritualistic in nature. However, the culprit claimed that he had committed the crime due to the fact that the victim had sexually abused him for seven years, starting when he was only ten years old.

The FB profile of the young man was reviewed as part of the investigation and revealed the following information. A few days before the murder, he wrote his FB status update as: "There are plenty of ways you can hurt a man, and bring him to the ground", a verse from the song *Another One Bites the Dust* by the band Queen. A week before that, he also updated his status as, "They stabbed it with their steely knives, but they just cannot kill the beast", lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles. In addition to these song lyrics, his profile also featured many YouTube links to other similar songs in last year. From their lyrics, some associative patterns can be derived: *TNT* by AC/DC ("...has not got no gun, got no knife, don't you start no fight..."); *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* by Black Sabbath ("...The race is run, the book is read, the end begins to show, the truth is out, the lies are old... No more tomorrow, life is killing you, dreams turn to nightmares, heaven turns to hell, burned out confusion..."); *Mr Crowley* by Ozzy Osbourne ("...Mr Crowley, what went wrong in your head?...You waited on Satan's call...Conceived in the eye of a secret, and they scattered the afterbirth..."); *Rising Power* by AC/DC ("...My body's for abuse, rising power, we'll raise the night, rising power, we'll wake the dead..."); and *House Of 1000 Corpses* by Rob Zombie ("...I cut the flesh and make it bleed, fresh skin is what I need...The devil's laughing in your face, give me another taste, yeah..."). In addition to these songs, the FB profile revealed another interesting status update (as a quote), posted a few months prior to the crime: "I oscillate between thinking I am crazy, and thinking I am not crazy enough" (again, written in his native language, but translated here).

3. Discussion

In the case under review, the murderer and the victim were neighbours, and close friends, such as the murderer's parents described. Since sex-related homicides can be heterosexually or homosexually oriented, in this case, the conversion from a paedophilic victim to a murderer of the paedophilic abuser occurred.

3.1. Satanic symbols and FB posts

The lyrics of the songs which were posted on the culprit's Facebook profile contain numerous themes concerning killing, death, blood, and so on. Despite the murderer's own thoughts questioning if he was "crazy" or "not crazy enough", determination of the mental state of the murderer at the time of killing is controversial. The lyrics of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* are quite analogous to the day of homicide (the word *Sabbath* itself means Saturday), as well as a verse from *Hotel California* ("They stabbed it with their steely knives"). In the 1980s, some Christian evangelists alleged

that the lyrics of the song *Hotel California* referred to a San Francisco hotel purchased by Anton LaVey and was converted into the Church of Satan, while others suggested that Hotel California meant the Camarillo State Mental Hospital.^{8,9} Another verse from *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* "I cut the flesh and make it bleed" is also analogous to the crime scene (on the furniture around the corpse, there were parts of muscles and intestinal tissue which had been torn off the body). Undoubtedly, this overall supernatural theme, which culminated in the ultimate urge to punish the victim/paedophile, may have increased the feeling of superiority for the culprit. The growth and mental maturation of the boy may have allowed him to become more aware of what he had endured over the years, while he had been the victim of sexual abuse. Since paedophilia ultimately implies domination of a child by an adult, the assailant often has good interpersonal skills with children and can easily gain the children's trust.^{10,11} By his lies, he obtains benefits based on victim's inability to think maturely. In the case under review, when the culprit became aware and decided to act in retaliation, he actually decided to "bring him to the ground", because "the lies are old" and his own "body for abuse" was no longer true for him. These lines are strongly associative to the facts from this case, so this kind of lyrical interpretation in a scholarly article should not be characterized as just speculation.

Searching data available over the Internet, the sentence from the FB status concerning oscillation between madness and not enough madness has been found to originally belong to Joyce Carol Oates,¹² an American novelist who published it in *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates* (a kind of a fictionalized diary). Only two of Oates' books have been translated and published into the culprit's native language. One of them is *Zombie*, a story of a young man who is accused of sexually abusing a child and therefore decides to become a serial killer. The idea of the story is not exactly the same to the one from the case under review here, but is quite analogous. As could be supposed from this information, the book *Zombie* was actually found in the murderer's apartment later during the investigation.

The data available from this case may describe a process called aggression immersion,⁹ which includes a cumulative and heightened intensity of exposure to music and literature violence. It also represents a chosen exposure to specific stimuli, purposefully initiated to alter and facilitate mood states consistent with or conducive to extreme aggression. The same conclusion was found related to murders associated with screen violence, in which the subjects identified themselves with the thematic aggressors from the movies.¹³

3.2. Motive of homicide

The number of stab wounds could be a sign of high emotional discharge of affect, intense anger, or rage, or merely an isolated consequence of the sex-related circumstances owing to such emotion. The association between multiple stabbing and sex-related homicides rises in accordance with an increase in the number of stab wounds per victim (determination coefficient for males is 0,88). Homicides in which the males sustained more than 21 stab wounds, are more than 80% sexually related.¹⁴ The language and imagery of the FB posts and the lyrics of music videos posted, accompanied with the conclusion that the killer had clearly thought about the crime, were evidence that the homicide was premeditated, and the result of years of sexual abuse. Since it was related to paedophilic abuse, the multiple stabbing could not then be considered as a reflection of high state of emotional discharge of affect, because a rise in anger and the urge for punishment of the paedophile had been already present for a year, as can be shown in the history of FB usage.

In general, besides intense anger and rage, a sex-related motive can also be considered for a multiple stabbing attack or killing. The murderer's taste in music was one means by which he may have facilitated his intention to punish the man abusing him. The satanic content of the music lyrics were, therefore, not likely related to the actual motive of the killer. Regarding bimodality of mammal's violence (affective and predatory overlap),² the presented homicide should be viewed as a strongly goal-oriented act with rage attack characteristics with the goal or motive to end long-lasting emotional (sex-related) provocation.

3.3. Using social media as novel investigative tool

Reviewing the FB profile (or similar social media) of the assailant in conducting psychological autopsies, should be a useful tool to determine the motive of a homicide. Every post (status, comment, picture, or link) should be thoroughly evaluated, in order to find any associations to the investigated case. Moreover, such social media sometime reveal the psychopathological behaviour of the assailant, or other content which might be useful in forensic investigation.

Ethical approval

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Conflict of interest

None declared.

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